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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3963
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 6046
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3740
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3599
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 4288
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1350
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 4225
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHDC

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SENSITIVE
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TAGS: [EAGR](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: LOCALS STRUGGLE ON SMALL SALARIES

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for Public Internet.

12. (U) Despite Turkmenistan's widely published wealth from hydrocarbon sales, the average salary in Turkmenistan is estimated to be about \$200 per month. The average retirement pension is \$50-\$60 per month, and the average welfare benefit is \$20 per month.

Effective January 2010, the Government of Turkmenistan (GOTX) will increase salaries, retirement pensions, welfare benefits and student stipends by ten percent, but many locals fear the increases will not cover the costs for essentials, which continue to rise.

13. (SBU) The average Turkmen family spends most of its money on food and medicine. On average, sixty percent of a Turkmen salary is spent on food, while the remaining forty percent goes toward other consumables, clothing, and incidental medical items and services. Many rural residents are able to decrease their food expenses by keeping livestock and growing fruit and vegetables in their backyards. In 1995, the GOTX stopped subsidizing medicine and went to a fee-for-service system. These fees, combined with the high cost of imported medicines, make it difficult for Turkmen families to afford preventive medical care, and they often do not see the doctor until they are very sick and cheaper home remedies have not worked. In addition, locals in Ashgabat told us they spend nearly \$100 per child each year (half of an average monthly salary) to buy mandatory school supplies.

14. (SBU) The Ministry of Finance recently maintained that Turkmen families spend 1 percent of their salaries on housing and utilities, including telephone and electricity, but locals we spoke with were adamant that they spend 2-3 percent of their salaries on utilities. Turkmen citizens enjoy free natural gas for cooking and heating their homes, nor are they charged for water. Electricity and gasoline are free until a person reaches his or her ration limit, but locals maintain that even if they go over their limit, the costs for electricity and gas are low. Rent for government-owned apartments or land on which private homes are located is also inexpensive. With these social benefits provided by the state, the GOTX feels justified in paying workers \$200-\$300 a month.

15. (SBU) To meet the growing prices for food and consumables, local residents often supplement their family income with additional jobs.

For example, high school and university teachers tutor students in their free time. Government employees who own vehicles work as private cab drivers during the weekends, and doctors and nurses provide private medical services, in addition to their jobs in public clinics.

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: The average Turkmen salary of \$200 will only cover staple foods and the basic clothing and medicinal needs. The Turkmenistan Government feels that the average salary is sufficient, given the numerous social benefits that they provide their citizens. Most locals tell us, however, that they are struggling to make ends meet. END COMMENT.

CURRAN